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ABSTRACT

This publication forms part of a program aimed at stimulating public interest in books, reading, and the written word and contains a lecture which was originally presented at the Library of Congress as a major contribution to the annual celebration of National Children's Book week. After an introduction by Sybille Jagusch, the lecture begins with the question, "Do I dare disturb the universe?" from the poem, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot. Using the term "disturber of the universe" as the basic theme, the lecture goes on to discuss censorship, the reading of children's books, writing fiction, love, and friendship. (EL)

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Dare to be Creative!

A Lecture presented at the Library of Congress November 16, 1983, by Madeleine L'Engle

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Preface

THE Center for the Book and the Children's Literature Center in the Library of Congress are pleased to sponsor the publication of Madeleine L'Engle's thoughtful lecture about the writing, the writers, and the reading of children's books. As a major contribution to the Library's annual celebration of National Children's Book Week, Miss L'Engle's talk was presented on November 16, 1983, to a capacity crowd in the Library's Coolidge Auditorium. Many of her admirers brought copies of her books with them, particularly the ever-popular *A Wrinkle in Time*, winner of the 1963 Newbery Medal for the year's "most distinguished contribution to children's literature."

The Center for the Book was created by an Act of Congress in 1977 to stimulate public interest in books, reading, and the written word. Its activities are aimed at both general and scholarly audiences. The center brings together members

of the book, educational, and business communities for symposia and projects. Its program, which includes publications, lectures, and events that enhance the role of the book in society, is supported by private gifts from individuals and corporations.

The mission and activities of the Children's Literature Center, which was established in 1963, are described in the introduction by Sybille Jagusch, who was appointed chief of the Children's Literature Center in the spring of 1983. It is our hope that this partnership between two book centers within the Library of Congress will broaden the horizons of each and help remind our citizens of the unique resources available at the Library of Congress for the promotion and study of children's books and literature.

John Y. Cole
Executive Director
The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress

Introduction

WHAT could be a more pleasurable and far-reaching task than drawing attention to one of the world's richest collections of children's books and related materials?

The Children's Literature Center at the Library of Congress has enjoyed this privilege for the past twenty-one years. Beyond pointing to Library holdings, the center has attempted to point to the creative elements of the children's books themselves, by letting authors and illustrators speak to that subject from firsthand knowledge. Madeleine L'Engle, the most recent National Children's Book Week speaker at the Library of Congress, presents here her view of creativity.

Children's books and other materials relating to the culture of the child have been selected and added to the collections of the Library of Congress since the 1870s, when they began to be received as copyright deposits. Yet it took the Library almost a century to open an office which would address itself explicitly to the acquisition, docu-

mentation, and provision of reference services concerned with the specialized field of children's books and related media.

Under the direction of its first head, Virginia Haviland, former readers' adviser for children at the Boston Public Library, the Children's Book Section opened its doors to the public on March 3, 1963. Despite a minuscule staff, the office carried out its main function as outlined initially in a proposal prepared by Frances Clarke Sayers, who, representing a joint committee of the American Association of University Women and the Association for Childhood Education International, had lobbied for the establishment of such a unit.

From the beginning, reference work was carried out and numerous bibliographies were prepared. The section served as a recommending agent for the Library's acquisition and collection development program, initiated an annual lecture during National Children's Book Week, and participated in Library exhibits. The section's staff acted as Library of Congress representatives to national and international organizations and associations.

A major reorganization of the Library of Congress initiated in 1978 by Daniel J. Boorstin, Librarian of Congress since 1975, affected almost all parts of the Library, including the Children's Book Section, renamed the Children's Literature Center. The change proved to be more than merely administrative. By joining such diverse offices as the American Folklife Center, the

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and the Center for the Book under the direction of the Associate Librarian for National Programs, the Children's Literature Center received a more defined, nationally oriented charge. This new function was explained by The Librarian of Congress in his 1978 annual report, when he described these divisions as "unique programs of the Library that provide national leadership in specialized areas."

The center's major goals continue to include playing an active role in the acquisition, documentation, and dissemination of information concerning all materials relating to the informational and recreational needs of the child. The center must strive to explore the Library's holdings and to make them not only known but accessible to the specialist or researcher and to the general public. Its office in the Thomas Jefferson Building houses a small collection of basic reference works, monographs, and serials in English and selected other languages on various aspects of children's books and other media. The center's office also serves as a public reading room.

Contrary to what most of our readers expect, the Children's Literature Center is not a custodial division. The large doors leading from its office to the adjacent pavilion do not open onto a vault of the Library's estimated 300,000 early and contemporary children's books and related materials. Neither are the numerous collections of chil-

dren's books in approximately sixty languages housed anywhere nearby.

The visitor eager to see some children's book stacks can catch a glimpse of those grouped together close to the Main Reading Room in the PZ section of the LC classification: belles lettres, poetry, folklore in the English and European languages. All nonfiction books, however, are shelved with their respective subject areas. Children's materials are scattered everywhere throughout this complex collection. For example, many foreign-language books are acquired and housed by the respective language divisions; children's maps are not only acquired but cataloged by the Geography and Map Division; children's periodicals are shelved in the general collection of bound periodicals; rare children's books are part of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division; children's books with musical scores can be found in the Music Division; original children's book art is maintained in the Prints and Photographs Division; children's books in braille are housed by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped; and a sampling of pop-up books is kept on the center's own shelves. Many boxes of uncataloged foreign-language children's materials are shelved in the stacks, accessible only to the initiated public or staff. The Children's Literature Center has its hands full acting as a clearinghouse for all these riches.

Users of the center can be grouped broadly into those dealing with the production, dissemination, or evaluation of children's materials (for example, editors, film producers, illustrators, or reviewers); the general public; government agencies or bodies relating to the welfare of the child; and those serving children directly (librarians and teachers).

Aside from its main function of information retrieval, the center has other ways of pointing to the Library's rich resources. One of the most pleasant and visible has been the center's National Children's Book Week lectures. Since 1963 the center has invited national and international children's book creators, including Maurice Sendak, Erik Haugaard, and Astrid Lindgren, to speak at the Library.

Madeleine L'Engle, this year's lecturer, was received enthusiastically by an audience that obviously knew her writings well. Her readers have long appreciated both her ability to tell a good story and the values she imparts to us: a belief in the positive strength of the individual, appreciation for the power and kindness of family bonding, and faith in a supreme force that guides and protects us and provides us with hope.

Madeleine L'Engle makes us believe that we too can succeed if we will dare to be creative.

Sybille Jagusch
Chief
Children's Literature Center

Dare to be Creative!

Madeleine L'Engle

DO I dare disturb the universe?" asks T.S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock. It's not an easy question, and there are no easy answers. Robert Cormier, in his cautionary tale *The Chocolate War*, has his young hero ask J. Alfred's question, and because this is not a novel of realism, as many people think, but a cautionary tale, the answer is, "You'd better not dare, because if you do, you'll get hurt." In this book, Cormier takes something which is already in existence in a small way and has it burst out into enormous proportions, in somewhat the same way that James Clavell does in *The Children's Story*, a small chili book which he was inspired to write when his daughter came home from school, having been taught by rote to say the pledge of allegiance, gabbling it with no understanding, and he saw how easily the tender mind of a child can be manipulated.

The writer whose words are going to be read by children has a heavy responsibility. And yet, despite the undeniable fact that children's minds are tender, they are also far more tough than many people realize, and they have an openness and an ability to grapple with difficult concepts

which many adults have lost. Writers of children's literature are set apart by their willingness to confront difficult questions.

Perhaps for this reason, the content of children's books is often a matter of controversy. There are, of course, built-in restraints in the writing and publishing of a book marketed for children. Responsible editors and publishers are going to exercise these restraints by refusing to publish a book they consider pornographic, or ethnically prejudiced, or in any way potentially damaging to children. And here we come to a very fine line: what is the difference between honest editorial advice, and the manipulating of a writer?

Many years ago, when *A Wrinkle in Time* was being rejected by publisher after publisher, I wrote in my journal, "I will rewrite for months or even years for an editor who sees what I am trying to do in this book and wants to make it better and stronger. But I will not, I can not diminish and mutilate it for an editor who does not understand it and wants to weaken it."

Now, the editors who did not understand the book and wanted the problem of evil softpeddled had every right to refuse to publish the book, as I had, sadly, the right and obligation to try to be true to it. If they refused it out of honest conviction, that was honorable. If they refused it for fear of trampling on someone else's toes, that was, alas, the way of the world. Finally,

in John Farrar and Hal Vursell I found a publisher and an editor who did understand the book and helped me to know what I needed to do to make it more the book I was trying to write.

After a book is published, we then come to the problem of outside interference. I am very wary of those individuals who are neither writers nor editors nor even, in some cases, readers, who feel that they have the right to apply their own moral criteria to the books in public and school libraries. I have enormous respect and admiration and love for the librarians who are rising up to protest this, because they are putting their very jobs on the line.

Recently I was lecturing in the Midwest, and the head librarian of a county system came to me in great distress, bearing an epistle composed by one woman, giving her all the reasons she should remove *A Wrinkle in Time* from the library shelves. This woman, who had obviously read neither *Wrinkle* nor the Bible carefully, was offended because she mistakenly assumed that Mrs. What, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which were witches practicing black magic. I scrawled in the margin that if she had read the text she might have noted that they were referred to as guardian angels. The woman was also offended because they laughed and had fun. Is there no joy in heaven? The woman belonged to that group of people who believe that any book which mentions witches or ghosts is evil and must be

banned. If these people were consistent, they would have to ban the Bible: what about the Witch of Endor and Samuel's ghost?

The woman's epistle went on to say that Charles Wallace knew things that other people didn't know. "So did Jesus," I scrawled in the margin. She was upset because Calvin sometimes felt compulsions. Don't we all? This woman obviously felt a compulsion to be a censor. Finally I scrawled at the bottom of the epistle that I truly feared for this woman. We find what we are looking for. If we are looking for life and love and openness and growth, we are likely to find them. If we are looking for witchcraft and evil, we'll likely find them, and we may get taken over by them.

On the other side of the censoring coin, there was an uproar in another midwestern city about the removal from the shelves of *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* because the word *Christmas* is in the title. Do we have the right to impose our own religious beliefs, from no matter which direction they come, on the rest of the world? I don't think so.

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Lewis and I have been listed together as writers of pornography. I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

We all practice some form of censorship. I practiced it simply by the books I had in the house when my children were little. If I am given a budget of $500 I will be practicing a form of censorship by the books I choose to buy with that limited amount of money, and the books I choose not to buy. But nobody said we were not allowed to have points of view. The exercise of personal taste is not the same thing as imposing personal opinion.

When my girls were in junior high school, Mary McCarthy's novel *The Group* was circulating, underground, among the students. It is a book I happen not to like, though I very much admire some of her other books. I read it because I knew the girls were going to read it, whether I permitted it or not, and I preferred reading it with them, and discussing it, to having them reading it subversively, behind my back, and perhaps being confused by it. The second chapter is a blow-by-blow account of the sexual act, and I remarked that when something so private is described so publicly it loses any possibility of being about love. To my delight—and rather to my surprise—I heard my younger daughter, on the phone to her best friend, parroting my words as though they were her own. And surely that was healthier, having it out in the open, than keeping

it under cover. There's no easy solution. There were books I didn't want my children to read, at least until they were older. Thoughtless permissiveness is somewhat like offering a dry martini to a two year old or giving a sports car to a four year old.

As a writer, I have to accept that books that are marketed as Young Adult Novels are going also to be read by the ten year olds. But I, too, read avidly when I was ten. I read every book I could get my hands on, suitable or unsuitable. However, when I was ten I simply skipped over the parts of the books which were not within the context of my own life. The dubious sections of novels did not hurt me because I did not understand them and skipped over them, just as I skipped over the sermonizing in some Victorian novels in order to get on with the story.

And the stories I cared about, the stories I read and reread, were usually stories which dared to disturb the universe, which asked questions rather than gave answers.

I turned to story, then, as now, looking for truth, for it is in story that we find glimpses of meaning, rather than in textbooks. But how apologetic many adults are when they are caught reading a book of fiction! They tend to hide it and tell you about the "How-To" book which is what they are really reading. Fortunately, nobody ever told me that stories were untrue, or should be outgrown, and then as now they nourished me

and kept me willing to ask the unanswerable questions.

I read indiscriminately, and I read what I call One-Read Books as well as Seven-Read Books. I don't think the One-Read Books did me much harm. I read them and forgot them. The Seven-Read Books—and sometimes Ten- and Twenty-Read Books—undoubtedly did influence me. And I wonder how these beloved books would fare today with those looking for excuses to ban and burn?

I must have read *Emily of New Moon* at least once a month for a couple of years. *Emily* has recently come back into print, and I read it again. It no longer had the same impact it had on me when I was ten, but there is still much loveliness in it—Emily's passionate response to the beauty of nature, for instance. But possibly some people would find this suspect, because Emily refers to the wind as The Wind Woman, and she speaks of the Flash, a moment of unexpected glory which often comes when least expected.

But of course what meant most to me in the Emily Books was Emily's determination to be a writer, her understanding of the immense work it takes to write a story, her willingness to listen to a crusty but creative teacher, to learn. Of course I identified with Emily. And Emily also had a touch of her Scottish ancestors' second sight. I suspect this would terrify those who don't take notice of ghoulies and ghosties and things that go

bump in the night with the Scottish openness to the world beyond our immediate senses.

Another favorite was *The Wind in the Willows*, with its delightful humor, and its delicate sense of wonder, especially in the chapter "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn." *The Secret Garden*, too, was certainly a Seven-Read Book. As a child, I read my mother's copy. I read it aloud many years later to a group of half-a-dozen little girls on a rainy weekend. And, a generation later, I had the joy of reading it aloud once again to my granddaughters. It's a perenially loved book, because I think we all see something of ourselves in self-centered Mary Lennox, and we, too, are freed as she moves out of the prison of self into the wider world of love and friendship, for the Secret Garden is as much the garden of Mary's heart as it is the English walled garden.

But the wonder and beauty of Mole's and Rat's encounter with the great god Pan is immediately attacked as being un-Christian, and I was horrified to hear that one of the censoring groups wanted to burn *The Secret Garden* because Dickon, the Yorkshire boy, mentions the word *magic*.

Someone sent me this quotation, without giving me the source: "A book is the only place in which you can examine a fragile thought without breaking it, or explore an explosive idea without fear it will go off in your face. It is one of the few sources of information left that is served up without the silent black noise of a headline, the

doomy hullabaloo of a commercial. It is one of the few havens remaining where a [person's] mind can get both provocation and privacy."

I wish we were all that open minded in our thinking and discussing.

One time I was in the kitchen drinking tea with my husband and our young son, and they got into an argument about ice hockey. I do not feel passionate about ice hockey. They do. Finally our son said, "But Daddy, you don't understand." And my husband said, reasonably, "It's not that I don't understand, Bion. It's just that I don't agree with you."

To which the little boy replied hotly. "If you don't agree with me, you don't understand."

I think we all feel that way, but it takes a child to admit it. And it's frighteningly true of those who would impose their own moral imperatives on the rest of the world, who would ban *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* for being Christian, or *A Wrinkle in Time* for not being Christian, or the Narnia books for being pornographic.

We need to dare disturb the universe by not being manipulated or frightened by judgmental groups who assume the right to insist that if we do not agree with them, not only do we not understand but we are wrong. How dull the world would be if we all had to feel the same way about everything, if we all had to like the same books, dislike the same books. For my relaxing reading I enjoy English murder mysteries, but my husband

prefers spy thrillers. I like beet greens and he likes beet root. We would be a society of ants if we couldn't have personal tastes and honest differences. And how sad it would be if we had to give up all sense of mystery for the limited world of provable fact. I still can't read *The Happy Prince* or *The Selfish Giant* aloud without a lump coming into my throat, but I suppose that talking statues and giants are on someone's hit list.

Perhaps some of this zeal is caused by fear. But, as Bertrand Russell warns, "Zeal is a bad mark for a cause. Nobody had any zeal about arithmetic. It was the anti-vaccinationists, not the vaccinationists, who were zealous." Yet because those who were not threatened by the idea of vaccination ultimately won out, we have eradicated the horror of smallpox from the planet.

It is hard for us to understand the zeal of the medical establishment when Dr. Semmelweis sensibly suggested that it might be a good idea if surgeons washed their hands after dissecting a cadaver, before going to deliver a woman in labor. This, to us, obvious suggestion of cleanliness was so threatening to the medical establishment of the day that they zealously set about persecuting Semmelweis. But, thanks to him, many of us are alive because doctors now wash their hands. If the zealots had won, women would still be dying of septicemia after childbirth.

Russell suggests that people are zealous when they are not completely certain they are right. I agree with him. When I find myself hotly defending something, when I am, in fact, zealous, it is time for me to step back and examine whatever it is that has me so hot under the collar. Do I think it's going to threaten my comfortable rut? Make me change and grow?—and growing always causes growing pains. Am I afraid to ask questions?

Sometimes. But I believe that good questions are more important than answers, and the best children's books ask questions, and make the reader ask questions. And every new question is going to disturb someone's universe.

Writing fiction is definitely a universe disturber, and for the writer, first of all. My books push me and prod me and make me ask questions I might otherwise avoid. I start a book, having lived with the characters for several years, during the writing of other books, and I have a pretty good idea of where the story is going and what I hope it's going to say. And then, once I get deep into the writing, unexpected things begin to happen, things which make me question, and which sometimes really shake my universe.

When I was working on *A Wind in the Door*, I had all the human characters, Meg and Charles Wallace and Calvin and the Murry parents. I had Progo, the cherubim, and Louise the Larger, the

snake, Blajeny, the teacher, and the terrible three *Mr. Jenkinses. And I was totally* bogged down. My story was not moving; it was simply refusing to go where I had expected it to go.

And just at that point my oldest and closest friend, who is a physician, sent me an article on mitochondria from the *New England Medical Journal*. Did that article ever disturb my universe! I had never before heard of mitochondria. When I was in school there was no such subject as cellular biology, and if there had been, I would have avoided it. But I read that article and I knew that my book wanted to go into a mitochondrion.

So, I had to learn cellular biology. I had to learn a lot more cellular biology than actually appears in the book so that the cellular biology that is there would be accurate.

I'm frequently asked about my "great science background," but I have no science background whatsoever. I majored in English Literature in college. We were required to take two languages and one science or two sciences and one language, so of course I took two languages and psychology. Part of my reluctance about science was that when I was in school, science was proud and arrogant. The scientists let us know that they thought they had everything pretty well figured out, and what they didn't know about the nature of the universe, they were shortly going to find out. Science could answer all questions. The most interesting thing I did in science was when

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I was in high school, where chemistry was a requirement for those going to college. The chemistry lab was in an old greenhouse, and one day while I was happily pretending to myself that I was Madame Curie, I blew up the lab.

Many years later, after I was out of school, married, and had children, the new sciences absolutely fascinated me. They were completely different from the pre-World War II sciences, which had answers for everything. The new sciences asked questions. There was much that was not explainable. For everything new that science discovered, vast areas of the unknown were opened. Sometimes contemporary physics sounds like something out of a fairy tale: there is a star known as a degenerate white dwarf and another known as a red giant sitting on the horizontal branch. Can't you imagine the degenerate white dwarf trying to get the red giant off the horizontal branch?

Then there are tachyons. Tachyons move at a speed faster than the speed of light, and for the tachyon, therefore, time moves backward, as it did for Merlin in *The Once and Future King*. The new sciences probe the universe with great imaginative leaps and nourish the world of story, of Let's Pretend and Make Believe and Yes, But What If (but I suspect that a degenerate white dwarf would horrify some of the vigilante groups, and perhaps mitochondria do, too, boggling the timid imagination), with their joy in the

loveliness of creation unfolding through the stars at night, the crystal uniqueness of snowflakes, the sense of reverence for much which cannot be exhaustively proved.

Disturbers of the universe do not always disturb it well, however, nor always for the benefit of humankind. Hitler was a great universe disturber. Khomeini is only one of a great many destructive universe disturbers all across the planet today.

So perhaps one of the most important jobs of the writer whose books are going to be marketed for children is to dare to disturb the universe by exercising a creative kind of self-censorship. We don't need to let it all hang out. Sure, kids today know pretty much everything that is to be known about sex, but we owe them art, rather than a clinical textbook. Probably the most potent sex scene I have ever read is in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* where Emma goes to meet her lover, and they get in a carriage and draw the shades, and the carriage rocks like a ship as the horses draw it through the streets. How much more vivid is what the imagination can do with that than the imagination-dulling literal description!

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I do not believe that any subject is in itself taboo; it is the way it is treated which makes it either taboo or an offering of art and love. On my personal censorship scale, showing violence as admirable is taboo. Showing the sexual act as

the only form of love allowed the human being is taboo. Back when the early human being lived in caves or in the trees, we had to breed aggressiveness into ourselves in order to survive. We had to be able to kill wild animals, protect ourselves against hostile tribes. But now we have come to a point in the history of the human being where we are going to have to breed this kind of aggressiveness out of ourselves if we and the planet we live on are to survive.

Back in those primitive days, we had to breed into ourselves a powerful sex urge if we were to continue to exist as a species. The world was sparsely populated; few children lived to be adults; we had to produce as many as possible. Now, on our overcrowded planet, we must rediscover friendship and love and companionship, as the need to propagate the species as rapidly as possible becomes not only unnecessary but questionable, in a world where more and more people are starving. Do you realize that the word *relationship* came into the vocabulary only a decade or so ago? Before that we had love and friendship; now we talk of relationships. And a relationship is not fulfilled unless it ends in bed. If two men or two women share an apartment together it is, therefore, immediately assumed that it is for erotic reasons, rather than companionship or financial necessity in this day of exorbitant rents. One can have a relationship without commitment. To love, or to be a friend, demands

commitment. Friendship and love need to be redeemed, and if saying that is disturbing the universe, it is disturbing it in a creative way.

A friend of mine who is teaching a high school class in marriage counseling told me that when she has asked her students what constitutes a marriage, none of them has yet come up with anything beyond the notion of romantic, erotic love. What happens when that first, marvelous surge of romance is gone? Is there nothing more enduring to take its place? Perhaps it is in story that we can give our young people glimpses of a wider kind of life.

I also want to practice self-censorship in my use of vocabulary. People who are constantly using four-letter words usually do so because of the paucity of their vocabulary. If you want to swear really elegantly, go to Shakespeare and the other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers; they knew how to use words. The use of limited vocabulary has always struck me as immoral: how is a child to learn vocabulary if the child is urged to stay within what the educational establishment has decided is a fourth-grade or a seventh-grade level? Certainly, in the late fifties and early sixties, when limited vocabulary was popular, the word *tesseract* was not to be found on any approved list.

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We think because we have words, not the other way around, and the greater our vocabulary, the greater our ability to think conceptually. The first

people a dictator puts in jail after a coup are the writers, the teachers, the librarians—because these people are dangerous. They have enough vocabulary to recognize injustice and to speak out loudly about it. Let us have the courage to go on being dangerous people.

I teach a group of eleventh and twelfth graders a class in Techniques of Fiction once a week, and each year one of the assignments I give them is to take one act of any play of Shakespeare's they choose, read it with a pad in front of them, and jot down the words they really like, but which are no longer current in everyday vocabulary. I ask them to put these words into sentences, and then to try to start using them, bringing them back into their daily conversation. It saddens me that each year the words they choose are words that were in the average teenager's vocabulary only a few years ago. It was far easier for me to read Shakespeare when I was in high school than it is for the kids I teach today—not because I was any brighter but because there was more vocabulary available to the average student when I was in school than there is now.

Perhaps one of the cleverest things the communists have done is to make education in this country suspect, so that there is a strong anti-intellectual bias among many people who consider themselves patriotic. I heard someone announce, categorically, that all college professors are communists. That's a pretty ugly way to

think. Perhaps education does open our eyes to injustices which make us uncomfortable; if we don't know about them, we don't have to do anything about them. Perhaps people who read and write and have enough vocabulary to think with *are* universe disturbers. But we need to disturb the universe if, as human beings on planet earth, we are to survive. We need to have the vocabulary to question ourselves, and enough courage to disturb creatively, rather than destructively, even if it is going to make us uncomfortable or even hurt.

A librarian friend of mine told me of a woman who came to her and urged her to remove *Catcher in the Rye* from her library shelves (*Catcher in the Rye* has long been a favorite of the vigilante groups). The woman announced that it had 7,432 dirty words in it. "How do you know the exact number?" my friend asked. "I counted them." "Did you read the book?" "No."

How dreary to spend your time counting dirty words, but not reading the book. And how revealing of the person who is counting. We do find what we look for.

So let us look for beauty and grace, for love and friendship, for that which is creative and birth-giving and soul-stretching. Let us dare to laugh at ourselves, healthy, affirmative laughter. Only when we take ourselves lightly can we take ourselves really seriously, so that we are given the courage to say, "Yes! I dare disturb the universe."

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